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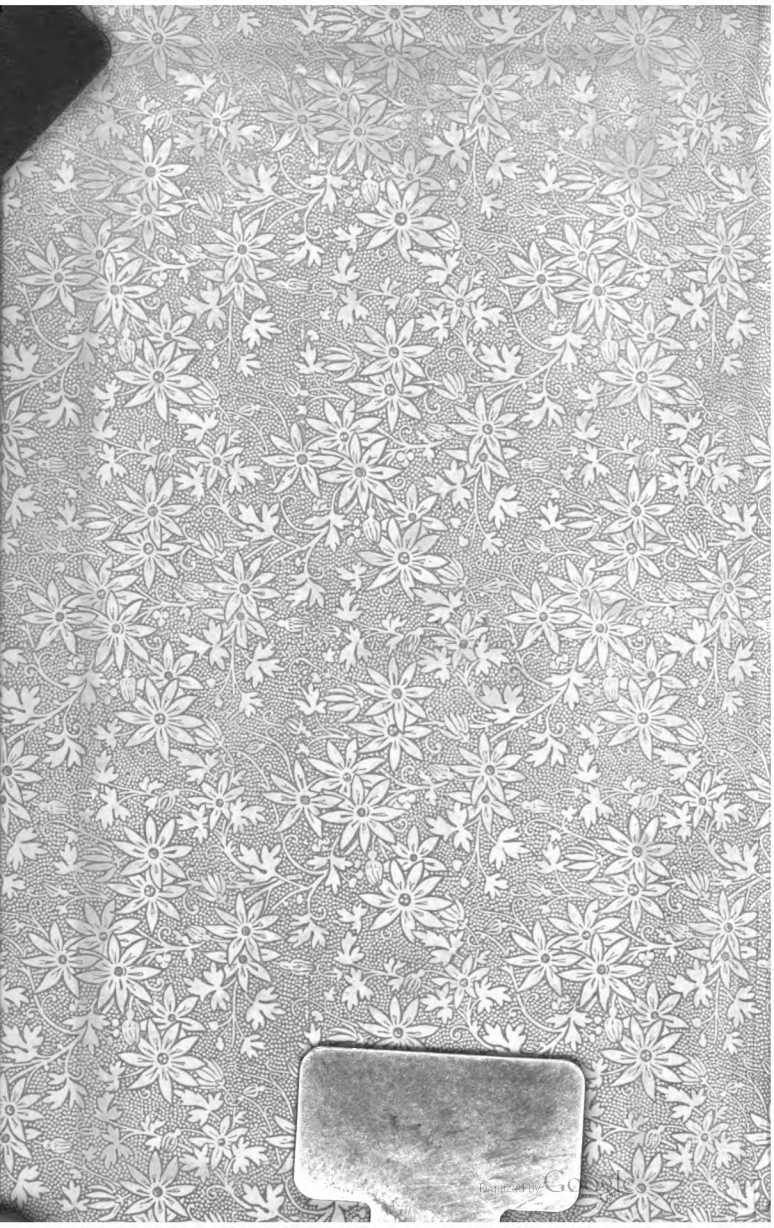
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ADVENT

WATCHWORDS

C. G. H. BASKCOMB







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ADVENT WATCHWORDS.

Advent Watchwords.

BEING TWENTY-EIGHT SHORT READINGS
OR MEDITATIONS
FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT.

"I will stand upon my watch."

HAB. ii. 1.

BY THE REV.

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Advent Watchwords.

I.

Watching.

THE key to all Advent Thoughts is found in the injunction of our Blessed Lord, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, 'Watch.'"

The Christian watchman is to be on the tiptoe of readiness, through all the watches of the night—"the night of doubt and sorrow"—the earthly night with its dark, dismal associations, its "dreams of darkness." To those that ask of any man a reason of the hope that is in him, when they in effect say, "Watchman, what of the night?" there is the reply, "The morning cometh and also the night,"—words which, while they are true of the natural succession of day and night, may be applied also to that breaking of the eternal morning which shall synchronize with the Second Advent of our Lord, as well as to the gloomy shades which must pervade and encircle the throngs of the lost. "What saith the watchman of the night?" We need not trouble ourselves with minute

and *over-curious* speculations concerning "the face of the sky," the impending storm in the social or political horizon, but rather deal with facts as they are, with those indisputable realities which face us, and which have to be met and treated of in time present, or whose after-consequences are so evident that it becomes us to look at them in their developed fulness, as we have regarded them in their comparatively embryo condition. Our watching must be that of readiness to act, not of curious speculation and of strained unrest.

Soldiers of Christ we become at Baptism. Later in life some are specially set apart as sentinels, watchmen in our new Israel, but in a certain and very real sense we are all watchmen—all called upon to watch for our own souls, for the souls of any near and dear to us, of any whom we can help in reaching forward toward the common goal. Like sentinels, we have each to pace up and down in the little sphere of duty God has given us to do. It may be quite a little one. "The trivial round, the common task," may keep us confined within narrow limits of action. We may long to strike out into new paths, and undertake new ventures of effort, thither going where scenes are new, and leaving far away the accustomed haunts where we almost recognize the stones upon the road, and yet there has echoed and re-echoed upon flagging

spirits the reiterated warning "Watch." "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." The watching may have been unbroken, "at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing," and still the Master may have tarried and not come. Yet He must come as infallibly as the morning itself. If the shades of night have not brought Him, then the break of day will. Saul, lacking patience to wait for Samuel, forced himself, and offered a burnt offering, and then immediately Samuel came. The foolish virgins, going too late in search of the needed oil, found their absence fatal, and themselves shut out.

If we do not desert the allotted post, watching hath its end and its great reward. And then, "oh ! blessed day that succeedeth to most dreary night."

"The world is very evil,
The times are waxing late,
Be sober and keep vigil ;
The Judge is at the gate ;
The Judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right."

II.**Prayer.**

It is in private that we have to fight the real battle of prayer. It is the private place, the bed-chamber, the oratory,—that place of which it is written, “When thou hast shut to thy door,”—it is that which is a real scene of the struggle between the soul of man and his adversary Satan. As it was in the days of the oratory in Gethsemane, so now there are secret wrestlings which the outside world knows nothing of, wrestlings in the watches of the night, at the dawn of day, in the heats, perhaps, of noon, when sun without and passion within, are scorching. We meet our friends and neighbours in the streets, and it may be they talk with us, and smiles are exchanged, but how little is said or mutually known of that soul-struggle which is the very essence of the life we live; far more so than those few passing words of superficial interest which often are the only outward expressions of the life spent in the flesh.

There are, indeed, some who have never known those thrilling experiences which probe the soul like a two-edged sword, who through the infallible providence of God, or their own habitual and quick response

to the calls and aids of conscience, have never found themselves in that whirlpool of contending causes, that vortex of conflicting wills, where the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

Happy, indeed, for them, if they can reach Heaven without knowing any sea but a calm one, or any wind beyond a gentle zephyr ! How few are these !

If we have never known the agony of prayer, as our Blessed Lord did, as many of God's Saints have done, at least we may try to realize something of the patience needed in prayer.

When we speak of patience in prayer, it is not merely the waiting patiently for blessings sought which is meant. To be patient in prayer means not merely asking earnestly and repeatedly, but also the absence of any taking upon ourselves to dictate what we should seek or strive for ; it means the constant infusion through each and every prayer of that self-forgetting supplication, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Without this, earnestness may be spoilt by the harpy-touch of self-love.

We need patience, too, in order to contend against those inward temptations which come to us through wandering and evil thoughts.

Sometimes these will specially haunt us in moments of prayer, because Satan is vexed to see us on our

knees, and tries to discourage us by choosing that season to molest us with his fiery darts.

Then there is all that tediousness of spirit which, as creatures naturally prone to evil, we are liable to.

To keep the body and mind in a fixed attitude, even for a short time, is not what we very willingly choose. But to keep up the attention, when our thoughts have to be placed upon an Unseen Being and things unseen is an effort,—one of the greatest efforts (there can scarcely be one greater), which we ever make. How soon weariness of spirit paralyses the action of the soul! How soon numbness and insensibility steal over the mind with blighting, deadening, effect. Verily, then, we need the live coal of grace to help us to pray aright.

Prayer has a preventing power.—to keep us from evil, to lead us to good. It has a furthering power,—in enabling what is good to go on to what is better. It has also a restorative power,—after sin as well as in sorrow.

This triple power of prayer is as “a threefold cord” of spiritual might, which cannot be “quickly broken.”

III.

“Our Conversation.”

WHEN S. Paul described life in the words, “Our conversation is in Heaven,” he was saying nothing strained or overdrawn as regarded himself. *We* think of *Advent* as a time for specially dwelling on the Second Coming of the Son of God, but to the Apostle life was one perpetual Advent season. His conversation was in Heaven because he lived in the constant realization of the return of his Lord. “We look for the Saviour.”

What comfort is there in these words, “Our conversation is in Heaven,” for those of whom they can be spoken! for “conversation” means nothing less than our “life,” its whole tenour, its general aspect in thought, word, and deed.

Surely such words chasten life’s morning, soothe life’s heated noon, light up life’s eventide. But for them how could we well bear the solemn memories of Advent, which ever come to us at the dreariest season of the year, when all we see of Nature is death and “calm decay.” But for such words of unearthly cheer, how could we bear the thought of autumn, of winter, of what they are, of what they are types of.

We witness the fading of the leaves of summer, which once made our hearts glad ; when in spring-time they helped to deck the renewed earth with brightness and beauty.

“ Countless are the wither'd fragments
Low in the leafy grove that lie ;
Faded, fallen, and forgotten,
As the sons of men who die.
So we, like foliage, changing are,
Though not so beauteous in decay ;
'Tis ours to beautify the mind,
And thus produce a Heavenly ray.”

All would be sadness were it not for those words, “Our conversation is in Heaven.” But if life is tending Heavenward, its decay has a dignity, like autumn, and like winter, of its own. Pregnant with the germs of resurrection, it has an inherent power, which is of God, even in its dissolution ; but not dignity, not power alone. but peace—a soft and tranquil peace, suffused through all its many-tinted virtues. The golden and russet hues of Nature’s dying foliage are but symbols of the varied spiritual graces, the rich and consummated beauties of the soul’s latest earthly spiritual fruit, where that fruit is to be seen in its ripeness. Is our conversation in Heaven, or becoming more Heavenly? If so, how may life’s sunset bathe all around in hallowed light,

beautifying the last outcome and product of that humanity which God has blessed, and which He will take to Himself in the resurrection at the last day to be for ever with Him, and to have its conversation fully, uninterruptedly in the most Holy Place not made with hands, there to have its whole being, spirit, soul, and glorified body, made partaker of the surrounding holiness,—adding, though only in fractional proportion, to the glory of its abode: for is not the safe ingathering of each soul to Heaven to the greater glory of God and His celestial dwelling-place, of that state so perfect, yet bearing new inpourings of those who are prepared for it, who have learnt to keep their conversation there?

IV.

Cycles of Time.

THE arrival of the Advent Season reminds us that another Cycle of Time has been completed, once more the Christian year—the “circling year” of the Church’s Seasons, her Fasts and Festivals—has come and gone.

We are as gardeners in our Heavenly Father’s garden—some bad, some good, some allowing weeds to thrive, others uprooting them with earnest care.

Each year we live, we add, as it were, a new circle of flowers to the Bouquet which we are making up for time and for eternity. What flowers shall profit us most? Not in this case the most outwardly lovely, whose scent for a few days seems wafted to us as almost the breath of the "summer land" of Paradise coming from afar—not the flowers whose beauty fades as soon as ever they are matured, but the flower called "Everlasting." Lacking in outward show of glory is it, compared with many which rise and die beside it. But it is *the* flower which we want in our Spiritual Bouquet; it is never out of place among the "precious things of the everlasting hills." We want to add to our bouquet, year by year, the thoughts, words, and deeds, which shall be as treasures fading not away, eternal in the Heavens. The life of the true Christian, though appearing to the natural man lacking in show of beauty, has, in the sight of God, the unassuming loveliness which is more lasting; it possesses, too, "the odour of a sweet smell" that shall linger longer than the strong oppressive scent of many a fast-fading flower.

But if we are like gardeners, we are also as trees in the garden of our Father. Look at the growth of a tree, as it may be seen when the trunk is cut through. There are plainly manifest the several and distinct

growths of many years. There they are—those yearly growths of a century or more—ingrained, so long as the tree shall last, into its history; the later growths fasten in and rivet down the earlier ones, as one year stamps and solidifies the works and deeds of its predecessor, as things now which cannot get away, cannot be undone, or escape from the archives of our past personal history. The successive growths of the tree are records of its life and work; they are, indeed, hidden from view, just as our past lives are hidden from many amongst whom we may now be living and moving, but, in spite of that, they are worked into the inmost tissue of the tree. Even when it has been felled, and lies by the road-side or amongst some leafy forest dells, the history of its life and work remains; it may be used for purposes of this kind or of that, but its story is told to the very last; the more it is cut up, sawn through, dishonoured after its once stately growth, the more is its past exposed to view. Within the prison-house of accumulating circles, its very earliest endeavours are shown forth—a circle for every cycle of time since first it rose the infant of the garden, wood, or field.

Trees furnish a history of themselves. They are their own biographers. In some sense we are so too. As each Advent comes round, have we not to face

the fact that through another Cycle of Time we have been stamping our lives upon the fore-front of human history, or, at any rate, working them into its texture with some of the clinging tenacity of united growths?

V.

The Long Home.

ADVENT suggests to our minds the greatest and most momentous change which can ever happen to us, when "man goeth to his long home." Very fitly does our Church prepare our minds for the termination of the Christian year and the return of Advent with those impressive words of wisdom which are found at the close of the Book "Ecclesiastes." In applying to ourselves the idea of the "long home," we may think either of the abode of the body—the grave, or the habitation of the soul—the place of departed spirits. Solomon had probably only one meaning, when employing the words, but it is equally true that all men go to the grave as regards their bodies, and to some waiting-place as regards their souls, until at the Judgment Day the "long home" is exchanged for a yet longer one, the final residence of man be it happy or unhappy.

Our present condition here on earth is one of time. In man's "long home" there is no reckoning by time as we reckon now. In Eternity no figures can represent the duration of the State. There will be no sun, no moon, to guide the inhabitants in their computations of time, for they will not need them in the Home of the Blessed, since God and the Lamb are the light thereof, and in the other sad Home of the Unblest, there is darkness. There can be no Sabbath Day, where every day is a Sabbath ; no lunar month, where there is no moon. The trumpet of the Jubilee shall not be heard where uncounted centuries keep perpetual Jubilee, or where joy is shut out altogether.

Be it ours to prepare for the better land, before "man goeth to his long home," and the hour of his break-up has come, like some golden bowl suddenly smashed and thrust away in spite of beauty possessed before, or some broken wheel, which just now had been spinning round, the emblem of animation, motion, life, now fallen down, motionless, still, the symbol of one whose work is done, whose trial is over, who is consigned to the long still sleep of death, not to wake again in the body till the Resurrection morn, when Christ will re-vivify the silent dust, and appoint the eternal home of the soul.

It is the special office of the Book "Ecclesiastes" to impress our minds with a deep sense of the vanity of this world, and therefore of the importance of keeping in view that "long home" towards which we are daily speeding. We think of that man as highly favoured who from the stores of his wisdom and knowledge could pour forth so telling a satire upon earthly life as we find in the words "of the Preacher, the son of David." But the king's wisdom, tremendous gift though it was, became an awful responsibility. If there is a striking reminder in the Book "Ecclesiastes" of the vanity of this world, still more solemn is the warning implied in the fact that the very man who could give such good advice to others was himself ensnared by hurtful lusts. He, who "spake three thousand proverbs," whose "songs were a thousand and five," who "spake of the trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall," who "spake of beasts and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes,"—who, in truth, was philosopher, poet, singer, architect, author, as well as deeply interested in the animal and vegetable worlds, who could discourse so freely, so shrewdly, concerning vanity, was found sometimes to lack the spirit of the Psalmist's prayer, "O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold

vanity." He, who in his wisdom remembered man's "long home," learnt in his folly to love too much the pleasures of earth.

VI.

The Benefit and Danger of Retrospect.

THE benefit of Retrospect consists in endeavouring to gather from the history of the past what will tend to guide action in the future. When this rule is applied to our own souls, it is evident that the chief benefit of Retrospect with regard to ourselves lies in the habit of uncompromising self-examination, in which an honest effort is made to ascertain the amount of loss or gain which has accrued to our spiritual life, and in which we do not try to minimize and explain away our guilty deeds or sinful omissions.

Retrospect, then, is beneficial ; but it has dangers.

One danger was indicated by our Blessed Lord, when He said, "Remember Lot's wife." He knew that the human heart is ever prone to look back with lingering longing at sources of pleasure left behind—that we are slow to break off from old associations and intimacies, even though they savour not the things that be of God, that there is, at any rate, a

kind of morbid curiosity which loves to ponder over the possibilities which might have grown out of such and such events. "If we had had some particular thing, might it not have fared better with us?" "Would it really have signified if we had just stayed a few days longer in some given place, by leaving which we seemed to lose some worldly advantage?" "If we had economized our time better on a given occasion—when there was a sick friend to be seen, and he fell into unconsciousness before we reached him—or an examination to be passed, and we were not as ready for it as we might have been—when an opportunity offered of accepting some desirable post, and we missed it through delay, or apathy, or vacillation—or a train to be caught, and we loitered on the way to the station—how much better it would have been!"

If we once give way to useless regrets in retrospect, a never-failing crop of them is sure to spring up, worrying, fretting, vexing, disturbing alike our social hours and seasons of solitude.

It may be regret at the thought of some past sin, the memory of which embitters the present. But if we believe in the forgiveness of sins, it is ungrateful to God to dwell on that which so great a price as the blood of Jesus has washed away and consigned to

oblivion, unless, indeed, we *will* go to the dust-hole of old off-scourings, broken fragments, and cast-away remnants, there to rake up the wretched traces of a hated and irreparable past.

It may be regret at the memory of some idol-throne which was once erected and cherished in the heart, but which we cast out to dwell with creeping insects, and be wet with nightly dews, though we feel half sorry for its fate. as we pause for a moment to cast one forbidden wistful look upon the thing, which, in our *better* hours, we account accursed.

So mingled with good and evil are our retrospects, so inconsistent in their effects upon us, unless we exercise a self-control, which may separate the wheat of fruitful lessons from the chaff of vain regrets and idle surmises.

S. Paul was well aware of the dangers of Retrospect when he described himself as forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those which were before ; he knew that to look back upon sin *might* prove a clog, a drag, a weight, a hindrance, and yet at the same time that it was beneficial to remember our sins sufficiently to make us the more humble, and the more thankful for deliverance from them.

He knew that to glance back at the days prior to

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his conversion would only remind him how he might have spent in the flesh a life of comparative ease, how, if he had not become a Christian, much suffering of body might have been spared him in this world.

He knew the loss of mental as well as physical power which indulgence in any useless retrospect would entail,—how it would rob him of present energy and vigour for action, how it would prevent concentration of thought upon duties lying waiting at his feet to be done. How could he, who had the care of all the Churches, whose sympathy with others was so intense, and therefore so Christ-like, that he suffered with them—how could such an one waste time or strength in fruitless retrospect. We have all little strength—little time enough. But it is sufficient, if we do not fritter energy away, or sacrifice precious hours to valueless ponderings which have no definite aim. Dreamy and desultory glances at “those things which are behind” can never help us to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

VII.**The Pleasure and Pain of Retrospect.**

As the prospective force of Advent leads us in thought to the Second Coming of Christ, so with equal vividness does the great retrospective teaching of the Season lie in all the circumstances connected with the Birth and Life on earth of our Blessed Saviour, or, in other words, His First Coming. At this season we look forward, indeed, to Christmas, but Christmas is itself a looking back to all that was enacted at the Nativity of Jesus. To look back at that tremendous event has its pleasure and also its pain.

Pleasure, nay, more, gratitude and thanksgiving, when we consider why and to save whom the Redeemer came into the world.

Pain, because we are reminded of those sins which brought the Son of God from a home of eternal glory to a self-chosen exile amid unthankful enemies.

So, in all things, Retrospect has its pleasure and pain.

Every victory won over sin, every work of love done for Christ's sake is so much material laid up towards a pleasant retrospect, not because our victories over sin or good works are any cause for satisfaction with ourselves, but on account of that Heavenly aid which

has alone sustained and strengthened the soul in every trial and effort.

The answer of a good conscience is a special consolation in retrospect, and helpful in all reachings forth after new conquests and higher spiritual attainments.

So, also, the sting of conscience in any view of the past is sometimes bitter beyond description, and liable, if care is not taken, to unnerve the soul in struggles yet to come.

The chief danger in the pleasure of retrospect is to live in the past, gazing upon sweet memories and agreeable pictures of bygone days, and unfitting ourselves for action in what is, perhaps, a less welcome present.

Dean Goulburn, in his "Pursuit of Holiness," has a valuable chapter upon "Living in the Past."

The tendency in any painful retrospect of sin, on the other hand, is to give way to undue remorse, and excessive anguish of mind, which may exist without repentance, and eat away the soul's life, "as doth a canker," for repentance is not stimulated by long-continued or abject remorse, indulged in and fed until moroseness of temper and estrangement from God are an inevitable consequence.

It is well said in "The Devout Life" that, "When we judge our own heart guilty, if we treat it gently,

rather in a spirit of pity than anger, encouraging it to amendment, its repentance will be much deeper and more lasting than if stirred up in vehemence and wrath." But "if anyone does not find this gentle dealing sufficient, let him use sterner self-rebuke and admonition, provided only, that whatever indignation he may rouse against himself, he finally works it all up to a tender loving trust in God, treading in the footsteps of that great penitent who cried out to his troubled soul: 'Why art thou so vexed, O my soul: and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God, for I will yet thank Him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.'"

In so far as the pleasure and pain of retrospect are produced by the behaviour of others towards ourselves,—in the case of the one, pleasure,—we are often apt to foster a growing sense of past delight, which magnifies it into proportions unrealized at the time of actual enjoyment, and so in the present to assign a flattering estimate to the past. In the matter, however, of pain, the reverse is the case; for whatever may have been the ill-conduct of others towards ourselves in "days that are past," if only *we* are innocent, the sting of bygone injustice is capable of becoming less painful every day.

VIII.**The Pleasure and Pain of Prospect.**

A CONSIDERABLE proportion of the pleasure which we feel is in anticipation. There are many acts to the performance of which we look forward, and events which we anticipate with delight.

Prospect, therefore, even for its own sake, may have its pleasures ; it cannot, in this world, have the peculiar pain which is possible in the case of retrospect, because the chief ingredient of such pain is self-caused, and proceeds partly from inability to do what has been wilfully omitted, or to undo what has been evilly done ; while, with regard to the future, we are free agents, except in so far as the chains of habit fetter us.

There is one prospect which must possess an overwhelming interest for all who believe that Christ will come again.

The Second Advent of our Blessed Lord is a prospect of most concerning moment for the sons of men.

The pleasure implied in it must be intensified according to the degree in which we humbly look for "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness ;" the pain must be heightened accord-

ingly as we have in greater or less degree come short of the end and object of our creation, and missed the true aim and work of this earthly life, in which, as in a vestibule, we have to prepare to enter into the "banqueting-house" of the Great King,—yet pleasure and pain are much dulled in this respect by sin.

Those who are the most ready to desire the coming of their Lord are also the most conscious of the presence of sin, and can at best only gaze through the mists of imperfection at those rifts in the clouds, which are the presage of revelations of glory yet to come. Such, too, as would feel pain at the prospect of a coming Judge, if they realized their own unfitness to meet Him, are blinded by the prevailing influence which they permit things of sense to exercise over them. They prefer to try and forget a future certainty, which they shrink from facing.

When we live in the realization that something is sure to happen, the prospect can scarcely help affecting us. Prospect must be pleasurable or painful. If pleasure or pain fades from our prospect, it must be because the prospect itself is ceasing to influence our minds, and one step is taken towards an entire unconcern or forgetfulness with regard to the future reality, whatever it may be.

So long as we keep clearly before us the certain

prospect of the Second Advent, with all that is included in that term, our moral consciousness is likely, by the grace of God, to be preserved in a healthily sensitive and tender condition. But when the will, influencing mind and memory, becomes traitorous, and we lose sight of a tremendous reality yet to be revealed, perhaps because we would rather not keep it in view, then there is a danger of our drifting into a condition very far removed from that which S. Peter describes, when he says, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?"

IX.

The Intensity of Life.

WHETHER we will or no, life is a mighty power for good or evil. It cannot fail to be so on account of its intensity. There are many who seem to live in a moral slumber, an intellectual drowsiness, a mental numbness, and indeed, so far as their hearts are open to *good* influences, such do exist in a condition of slumber or numbness. In reality, however, the senses

are not asleep or numbed into neutral impotence. The higher parts of man can know no neutrality. Luke-warmness and seeming neutrality in things spiritual imply a failure to recognise the claims which God has upon us, or, if those claims are acknowledged, there is negligence in acting up to our realizations. Consciously or unconsciously, there is a siding with evil. The senses cannot stand still in the active life of man any more than the will, the soul, the conscience. There is either an upward or a downward progress. Advance is an imperative law of our being,—advance towards higher reaches of holiness, or in the direction of confirmed or increased sin. The higher nature either learns to dominate over the lower, or the senses to bring the conscience and will in subjection to them. In any case, there is an influence emanating from every power and part of a man. He lives, and moves, and as he does so in the flesh, his inward self also acts. He walks along a road or street and notices the persons whom he meets, or the birds and trees and fields he sees around him, or, possibly, in a town, the passing fashions of the day. He does this either to his good or harm, to his further love of the world, or his greater knowledge of the vanity of it. Or, if he does not notice what he sees about him as he walks along, he is probably occupied with thoughts which fill his mind ;

those thoughts interest him sufficiently to absorb his attention. Such keen attention must be either profitable or actually injurious ; this will depend upon the nature of his thoughts. Or else, he neither specially notices surrounding objects, nor is specially occupied with thoughts, and possibly looks vacantly at people or things which meet his view. Yet such half-vacancy of mind has its effect. It may foster a tendency to be desultory. To the hard-worked man wanting holiday moments or days of leisure, it may act as a rest, if his brain has been over-taxed.

The point to be observed is, that in the life of man everything has an effect. No event or circumstance can be thrown away. It must influence the human being, whose path it crosses, for better or for worse. Therefore, we have to endeavour to go through life, not as Fatalists, but with that perception of Free-will which would fain turn to best account those precious years which we call life.

The intensity of life is a reality which has to be faced. We may live, if we will, as the lotus-eaters of society, but amid such apathy life remains ever the same, as regards its exacting claims upon us.

“Life is real, life is earnest.”

Life is intense. If we do not accept it as such, we

reap the fruits of unwillingness or blindness in the ultimate consciousness of wasted years and the blighted harvests of corroding sloth. If we *do* take our life in its true light, then, in every throbbing of our hearts, and beating of our pulse, in every flow and counter-flow of the blood within our veins,—in every action of our bodies, and effort of our minds, we shall discern the all-pervading thrill of intensity,—we shall see how full of life our life is,—how it seethes with vivid realities, and is pregnant with issues of immeasurable import, how it teems with thought,—it may be useful wealth of thought, or evil prodigality of thought,—how full it is of action,—either the sloth of business, or the richness of fervent work.

Well will it be, if at last our life,—that “vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away,”—be as the curling wavelets of the smoke of the evening sacrifice : rising higher and higher till they are lost in space, those wavelets ascend,—the visible signs of the invisible prayers of Saints.

The intensity of human life, for the present, runs through every soul-joy and heart-ache, through every sigh we sigh, and every smile we smile not grudgingly ; it penetrates each muscle of the stalwart frame or quivering limb ; it must last through eternity, joined either to the Personifications of Evil, or to that

Almighty and All-Blessed Essence, Whose glory shall rest upon the redeemed, to

. . . "Flood our being round, and take our lives
Into Itself."

X.

The Disappointments of Life.

LIFE has many disappointments; to some they come often or with occasional blows of more or less severity. On others they fall lightly or seldom.

How shall we receive them? Shall they cast us down, and leave us unnerved for future efforts, unstrung in our daily work? Should they not rather be accepted as a means of showing us what manner of men we really are when difficulties have to be grappled with, and of bringing out our characters in their true light? We cannot tell what a man is worth, until he is tried; disappointments put us to the test.

We may be soured by them, or taught to bear trouble with greater resignation.

In how many souls does the well-known experience of the Psalmist repeat itself,—“Before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word!”

Disappointments accepted as coming from the hand

of a loving Friend of perfect and unfailing Wisdom, are calculated to have the effect of a tonic upon our spiritual system. But some do not require such strong tonics as others, while different drugs suit different patients. For this reason, disappointments differ in number, quality, force. They come to the young in the sweeping away of airy castles and cherished day-dreams. They attack the middle-aged in sudden and unexpected reverses of fortune. They meet the elderly in the behaviour of sons and daughters of whom better things were expected. No period of life has immunity. The man of business is disappointed when he fails and becomes bankrupt. The professional man does not attain the eminence hoped for, and is disappointed. One who is gladdened by the attachments of human love discovers that what is human may also be fickle, and disappointment ensues. Another, who has been brought up in the lap of luxury, with everything to minister to comfort and convenience and earthly pleasure, who is surrounded by many servants, so that, at any moment, it may be said, "Do this," and the servant "doeth it," is placed in a condition of comparative dependence, or torn away from associations of ease and plenty; poverty has taken the seat of wealth, and many things which used to be done must now be left off. An establishment has to be reduced

to a very limited number. The pleasant ability to entertain friends and keep a hospitable board is changed into a less pleasing reception of little kindnesses at the hands of new acquaintances, and in the presence of strange faces, where we meet with generosity not unmingled, perhaps, with courtesy or attention, but yet possibly a somewhat distant courtesy and an attention rather patronizing. There may be, too, an inability to give to the poor, as once we loved to do; it is found much harder to be in need ourselves than to spare our surplus for the needy. There was a certain satisfaction, and soothing, rightly or wrongly, of the conscience in Almsgiving. Perhaps it fed, unconsciously, the hidden springs of self-love. Now we shrink from visiting the poor, because we cannot take any longer the ready silver in our hands. All this seems disappointing enough. Life has become wearisome, and we exclaim, "What means this change?"

Disappointments have a power to sweeten, not to sour, to soften, not to harden,—to brace up to action, not to end in hopeless depression.

"The fruit of the vine is never so sweet as when crushed. Human life is like the fruit of the vine. It only yields its best, when it has been crushed."

So, then, it is possible for us, after all, to bring good out of seeming evil,—to turn, by God's grace, the

withering grip of disappointments into the embrace of true prosperity. It is possible to rise up in Divine strength newly acquired. It is possible to gather together the scattered forces of our minds and wills, and by facing our lot bravely as it is, to make the effort which occasion requires.

It is a supreme victory of our being, when, undismayed by past defeats and present disappointments we refuse to lose heart and hope, but, concentrating, all remaining might of soul and body, do the work lying ready to our hands, just as it is, whatever it be, great or small, conspicuous or insignificant. Such an effort is nobler than all the sailing in those smooth seas we have left behind, far, far away. Now, with damaged rigging, the gale must once more be faced. But how sweet will the calm haven be, when all is over of the weary voyage!

If we will take our disappointments in the right spirit now, there is one thing concerning which we can never be disappointed, that is, our eternal hope. That surely is our greatest care of all. "Let me not be disappointed of my hope,"—my eternal hope—my hope in Thee, O Lord, Who art my Fount of Hope, my Saviour-God!

XI.

A Sense of Individuality.

"WHEN we examine the ancient mind all the world over," writes Dr. Mozley, "one very remarkable want is apparent in it, viz., a true idea of the individuality of man ; an adequate conception of him as an independent person, a substantial being in himself, whose life and existence was his own." In early ages there was a tendency to regard men as members of a particular family. A living writer has beautifully described the first outlook on the world as not being one to enforce the importance of the individual. "We see in it vast masses of men, streaming, drifting, like huge clouds, across the scene of time, and answering to the vast aggregates of inanimate nature, to the leaves which make up the foliage of the forest, to the blades of grass which cover the face of the pastures, to the rain drops in which the storm comes down for miles over the lands, the particles of water which fill the sea, the grains of sand which build up its shores."

We possess in the present day a greater sense of individuality, of the separateness of the human being, than was known in primitive times ; such a sense is necessary in order that all may realize their responsi-

bilities. It is impossible to take refuge in some shadow of family reputation, in the virtues of our forefathers or parents. We cannot hide our vices in the virtues of our ancestors or relatives. We stand alone. Each body is a separate building, each soul a distinct self.

The teaching of Advent specially brings out this truth. We shall be judged, not collectively, but individually, according to the lives which we have each of us spent in the body. The climax of a sense of individuality will be reached when God is seen to deal with us face to face as single, separate beings. He deals with us so now, but, as the operation is unseen, it is not always wholly realized.

Human nature is more prone to foster a sense of its separateness from love of self-consciousness and self-importance, than from any adequate perception of individual responsibility.

Every gift or possession is capable of being turned to better or worse account. It is possible that a sense of individuality may be the parent of self-conceit, and egotism. But properly used, it should kindle a sense of the dignity of man as a responsible agent, and raise in our hearts an earnest desire so to let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven. That light may be bright or faint, according to the talents given

us, and the position wherein we are placed. It may be only, as it were, like that of the lowly glow-worm on a calm and dewy night. The light may be weak, and not reach far. But it is there just as truly and completely as the great orb of the sun or moon. It does its work as faithfully as the greater creations of the universe. In its own peculiar sphere of labour it does its part, and fulfils its appointed function.

Our influence may be small, the circle in which we move limited, our opportunities of profitable friction with our fellow-men very rare. But our light may nevertheless have its proper individuality ; if it cannot be as that of the sun, at least, in a certain sense, it may resemble the tiny light of the glow-worm. That, which, perhaps, we may almost call the diamond-light of nature's grassy carpet, bids the lowliest take courage. It sheds a halo, very limited though it be. It tells us, in our narrowest spheres of influence, to shed around us the light of truth and love. What matter if the light of our individuality shine weak and faint, if only it is the best we can offer—single and separate, the outcome of a devoted self—a self which, while penetrated through and through with a tender consciousness of individual responsibility, and individuality, is yet ever losing itself more and more in the absorbing consciousness of an all-permeating, all-sanctifying Presence.

XII.**The Influence of Surroundings.**

THE influence of surroundings upon such a receptive creature as man is, necessarily, considerable. As we give out towards others by example, conversation, persuasion, so we are apt to take in from those about us, something of their ways, habits of thought, frames of mind.

Of what importance, then, is it, that we should be careful as to the influence which surroundings have upon us.

There are, of course, evil surroundings, where it is plain that we cannot safely run in our neighbours' ruts. If placed amongst them in order to try and do them good, our object is to endeavour to persuade them, by kindness, by precept, by the pattern offered in our own lives, little by little, to run in traces like our own.

But to many the influence of neighbourhood is neither altogether bad, nor altogether good. Life is, perhaps, spent amongst persons who are civilized and Christian; they do not appear specially worthy of being either avoided or copied. What of copying there is, seems to be indicated by lines, rather of grey and brown, than of black and white. The

strongly marked habits of a rude age, or of barbarous society are melted down into the milder customs of a civilized period of the world's history, and even where Christianity is not thoroughly accepted, it has helped to stem the vast tide of crime. When the surface of society is more or less polished, we do not see sharp points indicating virtue and vice with such distinctness as might be noticed on a less smooth exterior. But the mutual influence of persons living in the same neighbourhood may be increased by those subtle forces which work gradually and invisibly where more open action is absent.

It is in the little things which help to make great ones that we are apt to influence each other. Thus certain general habits are acquired. Society gathers its tone accordingly. To resist the stream needs moral courage, some force of character. Such courage and force may be stigmatized as narrow-mindedness. But surely it is more narrow-minded to allow ourselves blindly, and without good reason, to be fitted into the particular mould which some will, more arbitrary than its fellows and wanting in spiritual discernment, has resolved shall shape our actions. Meekly, but firmly, we may have to incur the charge of bigotry in cases where acquiescence means disowning Christ and compliance leads to shipwreck of faith.

Again, as we live in a little world of our own, seeing the same faces, and viewing the same objects day by day, let us not forget the interests of our brethren in the flesh, lest being deadened by the power of merely local associations, we have no heart left to care for the weal of Catholic Christianity.

Of what use are all means of contact between man and man through modern methods of communication, the telegraph, the printing-press, the line of railway, unless they serve to increase a mutual interest in persons separated from each other by long distances? These inventions may be all used as means of quickening that sense of brotherhood which ought to exist among all who belong to one great Christian family, a sense of brotherhood which did exist so powerfully among early disciples of Christ, but has languished during many centuries of religious apathy.

Each little village thinks its own affairs the most important in the world. Why so? Because it in great measure lives in itself and for itself. It knows but little of the greater troubles of the great world, and knowing them scantily, heeds them but slightly. The "combe" or hollow in which it often nestles, and which hides it from sight, does but set forth in a figure that incrustation of trivial circumstances which prevents it taking much interest in problems that must find

solution in quarters beyond the reach of its own ken.

Yes ! if we let them, surroundings, be they never so commonplace and uninteresting, may have the effect of, as it were, petrifying our minds, and deadening us, so that we have no interest left but in the history of the nearest street corner, or in the tales which owe their exaggerated importance, their imaginary rise and remarkably speedy progress, to the gossip of the hamlet green.

XIII.

Suffering.

WHEN our Blessed Lord came to this earth at His first Advent, it was to suffer. Until He comes again, His people must expect suffering in greater or less degree. We are apt to regard it as something which even in this life ought to be an exception, and yet if it were the rule even more than it is, would that justify complaint? For is not our whole earthly state properly one of suffering? not of pain or illness, necessarily, but of suffering, according to the original signification of that word, as implying a condition in which, to a great extent, we are passive, helpless creatures, who very rightly have to accept from an Almighty Actor, in

Whom is the source of all action, such discipline and treatment, such dispensations as are good for us. We suffer, or bear, receive, endure, welcome, such and such interferences of God. Sometimes these interferences are manifested in what we term sorrow, that is, chastisement, trouble sent to warn, teach, train ; at other times they take the form of joy, and are full of evident mercy, causes for thankfulness, helps to prosperity.

There is apparently no contradiction when we speak of suffering *joy* as well as sorrow, for both joy and sorrow are very much connected with what we receive or suffer from God. If our hearts are sorrowful, why are they so? Often it is on account of some particular influence of the spirit-world upon us, or, if they are joyful, true joy, as opposed to mere spurious animal joy, has a close contact with the spirit-world.

Joy and sorrow are to some extent constitutional, varying with temperament, circumstances, health, but we are in a condition of receptivity, and therefore suffer joy and sorrow as God sends them.

Our Heavenly Father would rather train us by the discipline of joy than by that of sorrow, but often the happier method fails to open the door of the heart, fails to soften, purify, elevate, and then it is that we are called upon to suffer what seems painful or troublesome.

In all the suffering which God sends there is one object,—to marshal the forces of the soul, to mellow it, to guide and prepare it for eternal happiness, to make it confess that it is not its own, but bought with a price, that it is to be educated and led onwards and upwards in the knowledge of itself and its God, until at length an acknowledgment is wrung from it, as from suffering Job, “I know that Thou, O God, canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. I have uttered that I understood not, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent.”

Though we may have to descend into the dark and ghastly gorge of humiliation and suffering, having left the bright mountain-top, nevertheless the very fact that we do descend into a gorge implies that there is another hill on the other side beyond, where God invites us to ascend, and find there that sweet refreshment of soul, which comes as a thing ineffably precious when we have passed through the valley of suffering, the dismal gorge wherein are doleful creatures, which speak of darkness and dreary desolation.

We have to learn to own with David how good it is to “fall into the hand of the Lord, for very great are His mercies.” To acknowledge with a sense of grateful humility that we are in a state of suffering, according

to the widest sense of that word—that we must be ever in a condition of dependence upon Him who can send us joy or sorrow, is fitted to make us see how vain are all those attempts, those sallies of will, action, thought, which are not undertaken in a spirit of union with God—how needful it is to be simply passive, except where and when the Divine Actor wills that we should act. When He *does* will that we should act, there is no room left for passiveness.

XIV.

Human Estimates of Success.

WHAT is the common idea of success in life? Honour, wealth, power, promotion.

The Life of our Blessed Lord appeared at the close to have been a gigantic failure, to have failed in the cause for which it strove, to have experienced the most ignominious of ends. But in reality Jesus was a Conqueror, and succeeded in the highest, truest sense.

Many of His followers have suffered the loss of all things, and their lives have been set down as instances of failure. Yet where would be the legacy of heroic example, such as we get in Martyrs of old time, and

in the history of modern worthies, if everyone carried his point without defeat or check?

We *do* need something different to the prosaic monotony of a stereotyped outward success. Amid the steady burning fire we must have the occasional flash of flame which sends through our rooms a brightness and glow peculiar to itself. We profit by the sudden burst of tragedy, the pathos of endeavours nobly made and ignobly thwarted, the poetry of some rare exhibition of courage, thrown out amid circumstances hard and crude, and suddenly checked in its budding success.

These are all wanted to warm cold hearts and natures chilled by the sight of heartless lives. These are all necessary in their respective places, that we may be braved for struggles yet to come, braced up by the sight of failure to bear success or disappointment.

The dealings of God are mysterious at the same time that they are harmonious.

It may be we have sometimes gazed aloft into the roof of some great Cathedral or noble Church. There, almost out of sight, our eyes rest upon some strange interlacing of tracery. There is "tier upon tier of carved imagery," and a wondrous blending of curves and straight lines, but no confusion. It may be difficult to scan every feature of the tracery, and some

of it in the dim distance is scarcely discernible at all, but yet all is harmonious.

So with our dealings with God. As the worm of earth is infinitely below the human creatures who walk over it, so are we, in our capacities and faculties, beneath that Great and Holy One Who inhabiteth eternity; and therefore we cannot pretend to fathom His estimate of true success any more than we can search out all the fretted work of some Cathedral roof, which, while above us in the material sense, is not worthy of comparison to that immense distance which separates us in respect of knowledge from the Divine Being.

What we have to do is not to expect earthly success, but to be faithful in the work which God gives us. That is true heroism, true manliness. The world may then account our lives failures, but God has put His stamp upon them, and shall wipe off the blight of earthly things, so that hereafter such lives may blossom and flower with a success eternal and that fadeth not away.

“In the great reaping-day of Judgment, when every faithful harvest-man will be called to receive his reward, and when fidelity, not success, will form the ground of approval,” human efforts will be seen in their true proportions, and every one shall be rewarded

according to his works. Worldly honour, wealth, power, promotion, will, in God's sight, weigh less than faithfulness.

XV.

Desert Voices.

WHEN to S. John the Baptist the question was put, "Who art thou? what sayest thou of thyself?" he replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias," referring his questioners, representatives of the Pharisees, to the ancient sacred lore they professed to reverence, so greatly,—to that grand chapter, ringing with prophetic inspiration, which we know and love so well, and whose opening words we have been not unaccustomed to associate with the noblest efforts of a great Musician, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God."

S. John the Baptist stands out before us as a marvellous example of self-denying zeal and unquenchable earnestness in the great Mission which he was called upon to undertake. He cared not what befel him, if only he were faithful to his trust. His humility and self-surrender were as marked as his zeal and earnest-

ness ; prophecy had seen plainly what that humility would be, and with all consistency and accuracy spoke of him more as a voice than a personality. "He must increase, but I must decrease." His mission was for the glory of another, Who coming after him, was preferred before him, for why ? was He not before him,—even from everlasting ? Accordingly the Baptist was well satisfied to be a voice crying in the wilderness, to lose almost his personality, to become, in the eyes of men, a kind of abstraction. The subject-matter of the great Mission Preacher was to absorb, as far as possible, the personality of the inspired Missioner,—his name almost forgotten on account of the intensity of his words. The voice of the man, and the tremendous cry, "Repent ye," were to obscure the speaker. His hearers were to think of what was said, not of him who said it.

We, who are in the wilderness of this world, have, like S. John Baptist, to be voices for Christ, to be so desirous to further the spread of His Kingdom as to lose all spirit of self-seeking, if only our voices may be heard and hearkened to whilst they witness for the cause of Him Who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

The customs of the Advent Season are not without their teaching in this respect. Through the still night air, or wafted on the wings of the breeze that is the

heralder of melodious sounds, come the peals that issue from Church tower or steeple, as it might be

“ . . . voices of the Angels,
Calling us away from sin.”

Or, when we are safe and at repose amid the comforts of our home, we are sometimes serenaded by “Waits,” or “Carol Singers” during Advent, or on Christmas Eve.

And what shall we say of all these things? It is dark, and if we hear the bells, we see them not. And it is night, too, when the Carol Singers come to us. What shall we say of them, if their perambulations are carried out, and their songs sung in a right spirit, with more love for the Incarnate Saviour than for revelry? The bells are voices for Christ; they emanate,—those voices,—from His Church on earth,—His Church in the midst of the desert of this world. The Choirs or Singers who cheer us with bright words before our doors or windows in the darkness of the winter night, are hidden from our view, like bells within the Church’s steeple; do they not seem to us as voices? May we not try to regard them,—should not those who take part in the Carols try to regard them,—as voices for Christ so that, though we see them not, they may be to us bearers of momentous tidings?

Ever since Angel-Hosts were voices for Christ to

usher in His First Coming, has it been the duty of man to be as a voice for Him ; ever since the Baptist was upon earth, the voice in the wilderness has always had its peculiar and proper cry, "Make straight the way of the Lord." Our voices should take up this cry, and so, when Advent is merging into Christmas, and jubilant gratitude takes the place of solemn reflection, this voice of preparation for a great hereafter shall be as a hand-writing on the wall amid the joys of earth.—not, as in Belshazzar's feast of old, to scare, and to alarm, but rather to deepen, elevate, and purify the pleasures of social hours.

Was not our own Gordon a desert voice for Christ, crying from beleaguered Khartoum ?

XVI.

Satan's Arrows.

WHEN, in the "Pilgrim's Progress," Goodwill admitted Christian inside the wicket-gate, he did so with all possible speed, pulling him within, because there was not a moment to spare. Close at hand was a strong castle of Beelzebub, and hence the need for haste, for from that stronghold arrows were shot at those who

came up to the gate, if haply they might die before they could enter in.

It is a scene which well depicts the suddenness and swiftness with which the fiery darts of the Tempter are apt to come upon us.

It is wonderful how soon an unseemly deed may be done, and still more quickly may a hasty word be spoken. But there are times when the suggestions of Satan cannot force us to act or even speak in an unguarded manner. Then it is that the great Adversary has only one resource left. He must needs direct his attack against our thoughts. Such is often the origin of evil thoughts. They are arrows straight from the quiver of Beelzebub, the captain of that castle whose frowning walls overlook the wicket-gate, and from which eyes full of envy watch each child of God entering in at the strait gate and pursuing his patient way along the narrow path that leads to everlasting life.

Christian, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death suffered so much from the suggestions of fiends, who poured into his mind evil thoughts, that he scarcely knew whether they really proceeded from bad spirits, or whether he himself was responsible for them.

There are times when we cannot prevent the entrance of evil thoughts into our minds, any more than in battle

the soldier can always prevent the weapon of his enemy inflicting upon him a wound.

Our spiritual warfare against evil thoughts consists in not allowing them of our own accord to stay with us. It is when we give them room to spread and to continue with us unopposed, that sin enters in.

But though their entrance—pure and simple—into the mind is a thing which we cannot always guard against, yet we may gain some experience as to the methods by which Satan chiefly attacks.

Perhaps there are certain circumstances, or some special moods of temper or thought which he chooses as opportunities for assaulting us, and it may be within our power more or less to avoid the conditions which have proved favourable for the furtherance of Satan's plots, and disastrous to our own happiness of soul. If such is the case, it will be needful for us to avoid the avenues which lead towards temptation, where the arrows of Satan have been found to surround us most thickly and with special directness of aim.

It will be necessary, too, to cultivate virtues opposed to the vices which Satan tempts us to indulge in.

While ever guarding against Satan's arrows, we must be constantly opening our hearts to the arrows of God, —not shrinking from them when pain-producing, as they proved to David, and also to Job, when he

exclaimed, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me." Of these arrows S. Augustine beautifully says that they are "the words of God, which occasion the wounds of love. For love cannot be without pain."

XVII.

Side-Issues.

If we would go through life honourably and be enabled to bring it to a noble end, a single eye must be maintained.

So soon as ever we dwell upon lower considerations, or wander off into contemplating side-issues, we are almost certain to reap disaster and failure.

Are we seeking some sphere of work, or endeavouring to decide what line of life we shall take up, or where we shall live, or what friendships we shall form? then let us beware of studying side-issues over much.

What a strange way man has, when he seeks one thing particularly, of bargaining for certain other things, if he can possibly obtain them in conjunction with the chief object of desire? If, indeed, he could guarantee such a perfect combination, who could judge him

adversely? But the strangeness is when he allows the chief consideration actually to suffer, if not to be lost sight of, in dwelling upon side-issues.

Supposing his wish to be the highest wish which a human heart is capable of, to glorify God and work for Him, how curiously does he allow himself to be fettered by this or that worldly desire. He will work for God, but there must be a bargain made for this or that accompanying advantage. It is to be of *this* kind or of *that*; it must be here or there, and not just what or where God pleases and knows to be best.

Happy the single eye, by the clear-sightedness of which we help to sweep away the débris which is ever accumulating through our own vain desires and bargaining hearts,—hearts ever counting the cost of the small offerings which represent the meagre measure of their own self-sacrifice,—hearts and heads that often discover an ability to put a due price upon everything but an immortal soul, that hesitate because of side-issues, while souls are perishing, and the main issue is at stake !

Happy the man who tries to forget as much as possible the outer crust of the circumstances in which he lives and works, who cherishes a keen sense of what life itself really is in its more hidden realities, who bears within him a remembrance that the Advent of

our King cometh when no man can work in the sense he can now !

Side-issues !—how we need to guard against their influencing us too much ! In the choice of profession, pursuit, object of affection, we may be tempted to regard as running in parallel lines the religious advantages and temporal benefits of a particular calling, post, or relationship. But whenever there is one leading consideration to be kept in view, and that closely touches the court of conscience, the thought of side-issues has to be laid aside. Whatever the question requiring decision may be, side-issues are only its parasites.

XVIII.

Judgment.

“WE must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Therefore we are bidden not to judge others, lest by doing so the judgment we receive become the more severe. We are, however, to judge ourselves, that mercy may be mingled with justice in God’s judgment of us.

In all judgments of this world there are constantly

tendencies to bias, an inadequate grasp of circumstances, a difficulty in obtaining circumstantial evidence in its full weight and proper proportions ; there are many strongholds of prejudice to be overcome ; many inadvertencies in speech, many inaccuracies of statement, many exaggerations to be guarded against, whenever the functions of a court of law do not make truth and caution binding. In the private judgments of human life, which swell and multiply secretly into great tides of public opinion, there are unfounded assertions, unwarrantable conclusions, ever making up a great sum-total of unscrupulous thought and incorrect reckonings which help to set man against man, class against class.

Terrible as the judgment of God must be, as shown forth in the Second Advent, it possesses one great consolation over and above that which we usually associate with it, and which we find in the love of God in Christ, whereby the Almighty Umpire is able to be just, and yet the loving Justifier of those who have taken refuge in the wounds of the Incarnate Son.

That other consolation, which is distinct from the love of God, is formed in the *accuracy* of Divine Judgment.

There can be no possibility of any insufficient knowledge of circumstances on the part of the Omniscient,

but rather an intense, because a Divine, realization of all the conditions of every man's life. We are apt to blame circumstances, and think that they have proved the parents of our sins. If, indeed, there have been certain shapings of our lives which we could not control, then God will not judge us for them, but if the conditions and surroundings of our lives are our own making, it is vain to blame circumstances.

The accuracy of Divine Judgment will account for many being first who are now last, as it will also explain why seeming loiterers shall in some cases win the race. God expects not impossibilities of any. Surely in His unerring judgment much account will be taken of all the minute details of life. It will be remembered in the Judgment what a man's opportunities have been, what use he has made of them, and where much has been given, much will be required. There are various degrees of opportunity, and all these must be considered in any judgment of men at the hand of God. He alone fully knows what we might have done, and did not do,—what we had the power to abstain from, and did not. How unfairly in this world do we despise one and praise another, because so little is known of the difficulties, drawbacks, and temptations which belong to each. We yearn for fairness, impartiality, sympathy, for patience on the part of those with

whom we have to deal. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou art the righteous Judge, strong and patient, and impartial! Alas, that we have provoked Thee every day!"

XIX.

Heaven.

WHEN the soul has found a way into Heaven, it sees God. God is Love, Truth, Perfection; He not merely *has*, but *is* every virtue. There is no virtue, no Heaven-born Grace but finds its Personification in Him.

In Heaven the soul is in the immediate Presence of Him Who is Truth, Love, Goodness—of One Who amongst His many names has Truth for a name, has Love for a name, has Goodness for a name.

They who are permitted to see God, see Truth, see Virtue, and then they will understand what Truth is, what Virtue is.

The sight of God explains every mystery. As soon as ever the soul sees God, it must know what Heaven is worth, as it never knew before; it must know, too, what this world was worth, that is, how little. It sees at a glance all the evil, unreality, hypocrisy, untruthfulness, that was in the world.

To imagine oneself placed in the presence of every virtue, shown forth in unsullied perfection, is to imagine oneself perfectly happy, and able to see clearly that the world which the soul left at death was a most unsatisfying one, not to be compared with that Heaven wherein alone is perfect happiness, and which alone is of high worth and dignity. Such a thought will intensify the joys of Heaven.

Again, all blessed knowledge will be imparted. Good cause will then be shown for many things which in this present life seem contradictory, inconsistent, unfair. There can be no sweeter knowledge to the redeemed soul than to be assured that all that is suffered in a world of trouble and sin was not suffered in vain, but that the suffering itself went to make up that sum of discipline, training, preparation, which was intended to bring about a happy and glorious end.

The fruits of the earth never come to such perfection as when they have first received strength and nourishment from what is of itself noisome and unclean, decayed and repulsive. So likewise the most holy graces and moral beauty of the soul follow on processes of spiritual cultivation which have appeared for a time uninviting, unbecoming, perhaps almost lowering, as the world thinks.

How consolatory to realize that not one of the

dispensations of life, the mighty raisings up and levellings, the upheavals and undulations, as it were, the heights and valleys, the elevations and depressions of our whole life-system and career—to perceive that not one of these, so far as they were ordained of God, were wasted or wantonly brought about by any freak or whim of a spiteful heathen deity ; that knowledge alone by itself,—must deepen a sense of Heavenly happiness.

Friendship, moreover, in Heaven, must necessarily reach perfection. There will be the companionship of Angels and Archangels, of spirits of just men made perfect.

Have we made friendships on earth, and do they seem so strong that nothing can break them? Yet when tribulation, or temptation, or a peculiar combination of seemingly untoward events crosses our path, and our friends see us in an unfavourable light, perhaps they begin to grow weary in their affections, or they suspect that we are not the kind of people they took us to be. Possibly they stand aloof with cold reserve, or deal some sharp blow in the way of adverse criticism.

In Heaven, on the other hand, there is no change of love. All are united with cords of love which no power can cut or snap. All glorified souls shall repose

in each other with the most entire confidence—all one in Christ their Lord, borrowing their eternal Love from Him, Who, being near them, is Love. True Love is a high, pure, noble thing. Whenever on earth we see it, it is a shadow and type and foretaste “in the cloudy and dark day” of Heaven’s eternal Love, pure and fervent. No evil thought or apparition of ungodly form shall ever dare to intrude with foul visage upon the blessed ones.

When we look up on a clear bright day to the sky above, does not the blue azure, so deep, so soft, so brilliant, so beautiful, so unearthly,—does not that intense blue azure seem to speak very feebly and faintly indeed, but yet withal truly, of avenues of glory, going on from strength to strength, and leading at last to the most glorious presence of God, Who “sitteth on the circle of the earth,” “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto?” does not that sight, so simple, nay, so common, which was beheld with our infant eyes,—oh ! does it not surely tell of a glory to which, as yet, we are the most utter strangers ?

Or, gazing up to the cordons, the outposts, and receding hosts of stars upon the brow of night, have we never longed to follow on beyond those merging multitudes of stars, more distant and yet more distant,

till altogether beyond mortal ken, if by any means we might fathom that deep and jewelled abyss of glory, till we came to the Focus and Nucleus of all glory, where God appears in perfect beauty?

XX.

Hell.

HELL is to be dreaded on account of what it is not, as well as on account of what it is.

The Vision of God, which makes happy all who see it, will be absent. There will be no harpers, harping with their harps, no beauteous or glorious forms moving about to do works of love and usefulness with angelic readiness, no jewelled walls, no golden pavements, no wondrous fruits or waters crystal clear, (as the Word of God represents the Heavenly marvels to suit our finite imagination ;) of all such, and of all which these imply that is beyond them in mysterious glory, there will be a fearful, an appalling absence. Heaven would be no longer Heaven without God. It is the Presence of God which alone makes any place "altogether lovely." To be removed as far as possible from God is the greatest of denials, the most fearful of conditions, which can fall upon any creature intended by the

Creator to bask in the sunny precincts of eternal love, and spend the countless ages of the future in Light Divine.

The peculiar feature of Hell is absolute removal from God and goodness.

Imagine a condition of established sinfulness, proceeding, perhaps, to worse and worse degrees of sin—sin and wickedness in their most virulent forms, personified all around in the denizens of such realms of woe. The very devils themselves masters of everyone there. What a lordship is that of a fiend, where everything is conducted and managed by the Prince of Darkness! No peace. No love. No pleasure. Not even the enjoyment of sinful pleasures. Sometimes in this world the wicked enjoy the company of the wicked. Sin common to both makes companionship sweet. Not so hereafter. The hands of the evil will there be turned against each other. The very circumstances which cause the base to enjoy each other's society in this world will make them hate one another there. The thought of partnership in sin during life will be the reason why they will wish to be separated for ever; they will be satiated and sickened with each other's presence.

If the absence of God makes Hell what it is—a terrible blank,—the presence of evil spirits makes it a special scene and platform of developed and consum-

mated iniquity. *There* is the personal presence of Satan, the fearful antithesis of the Beatific Vision of Heaven.

As in Heaven, Truth, Love, Goodness find their personification in the Supreme Being, so in Hell, cruelty, lust, pride, envy, malice are personified in Satan. They are there, not in picture, idea, or reflected odiousness,—not reflected as sinners reflect sins of the Author of Evil,—but in their original undiluted loathsomeness, in all their force, rushing from the Fountain-head of all uncleanness.

The realistic tendencies of Mediæval Art, and the quaint and weird piety of legends of the middle ages showed a strong desire to give emphasis to the doctrine of the reality and personality of evil spirits—witness, the well-known story of S. Dunstan and his conflicts with the father of lies in his monastic cell, when the wicked one haunted the Saint in his pious retirement. While on our guard against absurd or grotesque representations of Satan, arising from a morbid tendency to give outward expression to the power of imagination, we may yet bear in mind that, since half the beauty in the world is moral beauty, Art is correct in ascribing ugliness and hideousness to our great Adversary, for here again is the antithesis to the perfect beauty of God. “How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning ! ”

XXI.**The Approaching End.**

"THE Lord is at hand." S. Paul was so imbued with the reality of the Second Advent that looking forward, through the vistas of centuries, he was able to grasp the idea of the Second Coming of Jesus in glory with a firm hold. It might, indeed, be far off. It might be to ordinary human sight lost beyond avenues of ages. But yet the Apostle by the eye of Faith saw it with all distinctness as a future certainty. Indeed to him it seemed so real, that he could not help regarding it as if already imminent ; his eagle eye of living faith darted through the intervening epochs, and at the end of Time's long avenue he could seem to see the figure of his Beloved Lord resplendent in a scene otherwise so dim, and was constrained, (as he gazed upon that all-satisfying vision, and felt the gradual approach of a Divine Power,) to exclaim in tones of fervent realization, the wish being, perhaps, in some degree the father of the thought, "The Lord is at hand."

If thus long ago the Apostle could see so vividly the last great fact of this world's history, surely we, who live in the latter days should move onwards in

the light of those words, "The Lord is at hand."

Round a watchword such as this there must necessarily cluster many sacred resolutions, holy maxims, pious thoughts.

As the words close in upon us with the gathering force of waning ages, lapsing centuries, and perishing kingdoms, we learn more and more not to expect any Elysium of earthly tranquillity as the Second Advent of our Blessed Lord approaches ; rather may the ushering in of that tremendous event be discerned in every unblushing revelation of the Antichrist, in every shameless manifestation of the man of sin, in every audacious venture of the powers of evil, in every fierce attack upon Christ's Holy Church.

Have we ever stood in the shelter of some quiet room, or beneath the solid covering of some weather-beaten rock, and watched therefrom the tumult of the elements in some tremendous storm ? Have we ever thus stood, and gazed upon the warring forces of Nature's sterner moods ? In like manner will the child of God be looking out from his spiritual watch-tower to see the powers of sin and evil join together to make a last great attack upon the religion and cause of Jesus ! If infidelity be spreading, are we not, even now, seeing the marshalling of those forces which shall strike at the Faith of Christ ?

Wherever and whenever the true Christian shall view the powers of Antichrist arrayed against his Master's kingdom, he shall indeed be shocked in his mind and wounded in his inmost heart for shame at beholding his brethren in the flesh insulting their Maker by deliberate rebellion. He may desire to hide himself away in some friendly nook, but however much he may crave for this, no shelter shall be found other than the wounds of Christ. When men see the Prince of this world strangely busy, and occupied beyond measure, then, perhaps, "the coming of the Lord draweth" very "nigh;" and then, too, as now, must the soldier of Christ be up and doing, ready to take his part in that last great struggle amid scenes which he hates, and manifestations of evil which he loathes. Such a climax would be nothing else than the ultimate issue of the history of a then exhausted world. In that final war Christ must make up the number of His jewels, and Satan the number of his slaves.

XXII.**The Last Day.**

THE aspect of the Last Day will, we know, be terrible in its effect upon nature, as well as in

the matter of our religions and eternal interests.

Imagine the sudden breaking up of all the laws which have regulated and do regulate this earth ; imagine the sudden cessation of all those workings in the universe which have kept together the present order of things, the rapid burning up and destruction of all the achievements of man—what he has built with much labour, what has for the most part withstood fire beforetime, has resisted storm and tempest, has escaped volcanic action or earthquake. Every building, every stately palace, and temples, too, whose grey crusts of stone are mouldering with the wear and tear of ages,—all trees and herbs,—succumbing to the Word of God and of His power.

Man, with much effort, endeavours to blast away the hill-side, but, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, those very mountains will consume away, which the unrepentant, in their despair, will be imploring to fall on them, and cover them, that they may escape the wrath of the Lamb. Amid the crash of elements, and the burning of the old world, there will be preparation for Judgment, and for that new world which is to follow. There will be, too, the giving up of all the dead from land and sea. What cemetery or ancient grave-yard of our Churches shall then fail to yield up all the perishing bodies or dry bones

which lie therein, that they may live and not die in that hour of Resurrection and of Judgment?

What sea, or river, or pond shall hesitate to resign all of human form that ever has been embraced within its watery clutches, when every bone of the murdered, or of the suicide that has sought some dark abyss wherein to drown, or of the body thrown to wild beasts, or cut to pieces by some cruel fanatic, and every corpse mangled upon the battle-field, shall rise and come together from far and near, with a sound body, restored by the hand of God, after the scattering or burning or dissolving of all that comprised the body which lived upon this earth? These all shall stand before the Son of Man.

Who shall survive the fearful recital of the catalogue of sins enumerated in the Heavenly archives? None, verily, had there not been upon the very Book of Judgment itself a stain—a crimson stain. Thereon have fallen, as it were, some precious blots—blood-red blots. What stain is this which has, so to speak, so smeared the pages of that book as to make *some* of the accounts of justice no longer legible—not all, alas! but *some* of the dread catalogues of sin? Blessed stains, stains of the Blood of Christ, which have covered the list of trespasses for such as have sought to serve their Saviour. God will not endeavour

to erase that stain wherever on the pages of the Book of Judgment it has fallen. All who have found precious the Blood of the Saviour have their names written in another book—the Book of Life. Amid the chaos of the old world they—but they only—will be safe, as were the Israelites from the destroying angel, when on their door-posts was seen the Blood of the Covenant

XXIII.

The Personal Return of Christ, Part I.

“HE cometh with clouds,”—making the clouds His chariot. He is the true “Cloud Gatherer ;” He cometh with them ; He forceth them asunder, that He may be seen of all. Then will be real cause to say, “Lo, here, or, Lo, there,” when the sign of the Son of Man shall be appearing in the Heavens, and in the clouds of Heaven He shall be coming with power and great glory ; it is emphatically in the clouds of Heaven that Christ will come, so that we may, perhaps, picture some special utilization of those vapoury masses which robe the firmament to form the cloud-chariot of the coming Judge ; and, indeed, we may think of them as encompassing and being beneath and above and on

either side of that most awful and glorious Form of the Saviour descending toward this earth of ours ; but look again, they have been rift asunder, and suddenly some persecuted Saint, wearily watching in the latter days of Time, shall discern the Person of Him Who is dearer to him than anyone on earth, or, perhaps, some ignorant peasant, some lowly shepherd of the last days, shall be the first to discern in the Heavens a light above the brightness of the sun, (like that which the early shepherds of Bethlehem saw,) a light which shall lay him prostrate on the ground in fear and trembling, till, as of old, angelic reassurances shall bid him rise and join in the jubilant anthem of praise which those shall sing who have waited patiently for the Lord, and which shall take the place of those Hymns of the Incarnation that have echoed, and are still echoing, through the centuries that pass between the First and Second Advent of Christ our Lord.

Many another lowly and contrite one shall then rejoice—all who have waited in faith for the salvation of God, and whose lot it shall to live on the earth the last of all the races of mankind till Christ Himself appear. Patient waiters there will be then as now. The outer coating of society may change, but the inner spirit must remain, and the same developments

will repeat themselves under new exteriors even to the end.

Who shall say whether the faithful in Christ Jesus shall in the last days have beauteous shrines wherein to worship, or whether the Man of Sin and the spirit of Antichrist shall by that time have robbed the true Church Militant of her noblest temples and have devoured the most august houses of God in the land? Who shall say whether contemplative Mary shall still sit at the feet of Jesus in the work of a Deaconess, or a Sister of Mercy, or any other devout worker, or whether zealous Martha shall still accomplish her daily tasks amid such domestic circumstances as we find around us in the present day? We cannot tell, but Mary will be Mary still, and there will be Martha still—each faithful in her own sphere.

Who shall say whether the servant of God shall still lean on Jesus' breast in the Sacred Communion Feast, encompassed by all the best devotional helps, or whether he shall hold Communion with his Lord amidst many difficulties and drawbacks, and with locked doors, because of some Arch-persecutor of the latter days? There must be,—there will be those who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and these shall not be ashamed when Jesus "cometh with clouds."

XXIV.

The Personal Return of Christ, Part II.

“EVERY eye shall see Him,”—both of the wicked and the good, of the dead and of the living. Not the blessed dead alone of ancient days and modern times, but the unrepentant too—not those only who are famed in the pages of Scripture as special saints or sinners, but Pagans of bygone ages, illustrious Greeks or Romans, who desired to know more than they could about Virtue, and Truth, and Goodness, and corrupt heathens in high places, who sinned against the only light they possessed, the light of nature—all these shall see God, “every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him.” And who are these? Are they the soldiers who pierced the Sacred Side of Christ? They, indeed, shall look on Him Whom once in ignorant hate and fanatical passion they pierced; but not these only. We dare not say who those are who have pierced Christ, and which of us can say that we have at no time pierced Him? This is an Advent question for us—Have we pierced Christ? If so, when, where, how? by what besetting sin? by what wilful commission, or heedless omission? Verily at the last day we, each and all, shall look on

Him Whom we have pierced—in that hour when the blind shall see, and the idiotic shall know, and the insane shall understand—in that moment, when the thoughtless shall think, and the tattlers shall be silent.

When our Blessed Lord appears at His Second Advent, how different will be the circumstances connected with His Descent to those which we associate with His Ascension! No little humble knot of men alone shall witness His re-appearance in glory. He will not descend in obscure quietness, and with silent calm.

May we not picture the glory of the Saviour's coming manifesting itself to the whole earth at once, as if by some new law of light and sound, which the old world (then passing away with its worn-out laws and statute books) never knew before?

The various continents of the world, the remotest Isles of the Pacific, shall witness that brilliant appearance of Jesus in glory. Through streets of crowded cities, full (even to the end) of the buzz and hum of the toiling, hurrying, money-loving, gain-getting world, across tropical plains and barren snow-fields, from pole to pole, shall go forth with awful distinctness the voice of the Herald-Archangel, summoning quick and dead, and the all-penetrating trumpet shall give notice of the roll-call of humanity, and from the four winds a

great multitude which no man can number shall be gathered, and they shall no more need Imagination or Art to give a poor and incorrect idea of what the Second Coming of Christ or the Last Judgment shall be like, for every eye shall see the Son of Man. No man will be able to bear the burden for his brother then. Well, indeed, it is for us if a sword pierce through our own souls now, before we have to look upon Him, Whom, perhaps, we have pierced so often !

What bliss for those who have prepared to meet their Lord, to gaze at last, not once or twice, but for ever, with soul and mind entranced, upon the most glorious and gracious countenance of the once pierced Saviour !

When Christ appears, He will find man's work still unfinished, but His own last work for man will then be finished—His work of intercession.

Possibly He will find Bishops or Priests in the very act of baptizing, confirming, marrying, burying, and to each of them He will in effect say, "Put up thy sword into the sheath, for the great war of the Church Militant against the world, the flesh, and the devil is ended for evermore."

XXV.**“Quietness and Confidence.”**

ISAIAH, the great Prophet of the First Advent of Christ has supplied the Church of God with many words of consolation as well as beauty,—not least among them these,—“in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”

The soul that knows anything of the struggles and trials of the spiritual life, and especially of the life of penitence, is well aware how great are the oscillations experienced in our higher nature. The soul awaking from the slumber of sin resembles the condition of the fevered patient who is beginning to emerge from the crisis of disease to the various stages of convalescence. The period of convalescence is critical, being liable to relapses and drawbacks peculiar to itself. There should be effort, but not too much. There must be hope and courage balanced by patience and care. Even so in the recovery of the penitent. There may be occasional relapses, when the pendulum, so to speak, of the soul, oscillates uneasily between good and evil tendencies. The wave that dashes suddenly far up the beach recedes, and the waters scarcely

seem to gain any ground, but if the tide is flowing, high water-mark is reached at last.

The soul has a mean to keep between two extremes.

When penitent, it is in danger of being dejected, and perhaps fears that the besetting sin will never be conquered. Or, it may look for a too quick and easy victory, and reckon on immediate relief.

Satan understands what materials he has to work with.

If the natural temperament or bodily state of health is such as to produce depression, he will endeavour to discourage the penitent soul, and to weary it with that "sadness and melancholy in which he delights, because," as S. Francis de Sales has said, "they are his own characteristics."

If, on the other hand, he has to deal with a sanguine mind, and an ample flood of animal spirits, he may suggest that a triumph is sure to come very speedily.

How shall the soul preserve a mean between the two extremes of dejection and over-sanguineness (or over-confidence)? "In quietness and confidence shall be" its "strength." Let it cling to the Cross and to all that the Cross tells us of the love of God. Then it will not be dangerously exalted, when, as it were, caught up into Paradise, it hears unspeakable

words, which a man may not utter. Nor will it be unduly cast down when thronging demons hurl rudely into it their manifold suggestions of evil. It shall be quiet, but not alone or dejected, for God is with it. It shall confide in a Strength not its own, and this will prevent all over-confidence.

Dejection and over-confidence prove that we do not realize the extent of our own weakness, and that we are mistrusting God, and putting too much trust in ourselves.

If we understood our proneness to fall, we should not be surprised at our falls, and take offence, as if the battle had been lost, and further resistance had become useless, nor yet be over-sanguine before we had endured to the end. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved." It is not by cutting our own souls with the knives and lances of remorse, nor yet by occasional gushes of fervid devotion that we help to further our safety, but by returning promptly to God after every backsliding step or fall, and by resting trustfully with our inner man, as S. John did with the outward as well as the inner, upon the Eternal Love.

XXVI.

Memory.

THE functions of Memory are so subtle that we depend unconsciously upon them in the most ordinary events of daily life.

Impressions are being constantly stamped upon our memories voluntarily or involuntarily. Impressions made upon our minds have much less influence than when they touch the memory too. The mind may receive an impression of good or evil, but if the effect lasts only for a moment, the consequence is much less important than if memory imbibes, and, firmly and durably, stamps the impression upon the thinking faculties.

Memory, therefore, is a powerful engine for good or evil.

It is Divine Grace acting upon Memory as an instrument which helps us to store up in our minds the words of Scripture which we have read or heard, the helpful instruction received through useful books or from friends, to recollect with gratitude kindnesses, little or great.

It is the well stored memory which helps to make solitude bearable, which gives resources (otherwise

unknown) in sickness or sorrow, which furnishes an answer to the "man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in " us, which sweetens moments of comparative inactivity of mind or body, bringing to the surface of our thoughts ideas and words fitted to soothe and feed our spirits. A memory well-supplied is as the granaries of Egypt, when abounding in corn enough to provide sustenance for years of dearth.

When hands are filled "with service blest," and there is not much spare time for reading, and again, when, perhaps, sight and hearing begin to fail, but recollection has not yet abdicated her seat, the memory of some treasured line of poetry or a few favourite words of prose aids and cheers the mind, and prevents it falling a prey to monotony or vacuity.

By the operation of the Evil One, on the other hand, Memory retains unhallowed thoughts, sucks in and holds fast the germ which produces words and deeds of impiety, broods over wrongs inflicted, (until they are magnified and multiplied into a purely imaginary importance,) and drinks the poisoned waters of unsound literature.

The consecration of Memory ever brings its own reward.

Our Blessed Lord appealed to us to consecrate it, when He instituted the Holy Eucharist. Our Church

makes the same request in the Holy Communion Office. Can there be any higher effort of Memory than to "Do this in remembrance of Me?" When body, soul, and spirit are offered up to God, Memory must be offered with them.

In the Holy Communion Memory links together in mysterious sequence the two Advents of Christ. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's" Human Life and Death, (that is, His First Coming,) "till He come" (at His Second Advent).

Memory asserts her power to bring before us the thought of the Nativity, Life, and Death of Jesus, as well as the word of prophecy, "Surely I come quickly."

XXVII.

Things Doubtful.

THERE are many occasions when it is easy to see which way the Holy Spirit of God would bid us go, from what deeds abstain, what acts perform, what words speak and which omit, whether this or that thought is to be entertained, or rejected. Other mat-

ters, which are less plain, require more care, and a special seeking of Divine Truth and Guidance.

It is the large class of *things doubtful*,—whether in deed, word, or thought,—which calls for such special prayerful care.

As we look at some fair tree whose upward growth has reached no mean dimensions, we see plainly enough that parent trunk, those first main shoots and stems which point to its earlier developments, but, gazing higher and higher, fail to trace the continuance of this or that special growth ; if we try to do so, we lose ourselves in that vast commingling of branches and twigs which meet the curious eye, and the search is given up, for we have lost our reckonings in that leafy labyrinth. Who but a Heavenly Guide should enable us to cope with that vast mystic labyrinth of cause and effect, of procedure and result, of beginnings and endings, of new departures and fresh issues which must come in our way in the course of life ?

It is when we have to grapple with uncertainty, when things are doubtful, when there is a mixed appearance of good and evil, that a special difficulty arises.

Have we never felt that there are times when no mere amount of human reckoning or reason can suffice to point our course ? We may occasionally spend hours in the vain endeavour to arrive at some

satisfactory conclusion as to how we shall act. What worlds would we give sometimes, if we could only know whether to abstain from or share in this or that undertaking or business ; and in the hour of pleasure, is it easy always to be assured of the safety of touching and tasting ?

Even when there is ample time and leisure to consider the desirability of some project or undertaking, our conclusions may be false or vain, unless they be overshadowed by the gold and silver wing of the Holy Dove.

Most of all, when we have very little time or opportunity to think about some urgent matter, when emergencies hedge us in with narrowed precincts, and enfold us in a tightening grasp,—at such a moment, when some great concern must be attended to, some plan decided on, some scheme framed, and all, possibly, in comparative haste,—at that time to whom should we go for succour and direction, if not to the Holy Spirit of God ?

Perhaps no friend is near at hand whom we can really trust to guide us. Is there a sense of loneliness, of distraction, a self-questioning, taking some such form as this, “What shall I do, to do right?” oh ! then, so far from land, we need a Heavenly Pilot Who can guide us to a haven of clear knowledge, where we

may calmly discern what is God's will, and the particular claims which that will has upon us with regard to the special urgent work which our hands are finding to do.

XXVIII.

The Break of Day.

“How beautiful upon the mountains” is the break of day,—beautiful, too, in the valleys, and over all the face of Nature!

The Coming of Christ was in a spiritual sense to the world the Break of Day. As the night-watcher waits through the long hours of darkness, and then welcomes Dawn, and as he sees the sun gradually light up each object upon which in turn its radiance falls, so a world, (heart-sick with sins and self-caused sorrows,) had waited through many a weary century. Depraved idol-worship, Imperial sensuality, Pharisaical pride had occupied men's minds and corrupted their hearts.

Amid the gloom the few true Prophets of the Lord had sent forth from time to time their stern denunciations of existing evils, their words of hope and warning. Still the same sun shone upon the wicked as upon

the remnant of faithful hearts ; still the same stars looked down on a world that hated now, and now revelled in, its own baseness. It was the thick darkness of the night of sin—and it was dark upon the hill-sides around Bethlehem ; “the flocks are resting, the shepherds are watching beside them in the darkness”—and suddenly “an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.” “The bright light gleams out upon the green sward ; the night is filled with music, the gloom broken up with tints of Heavenly colour. The whole air seems full of visions. The distance is thronged with Heavenly beings, their faces sublime and tender. The shepherds are beginning to realize their own ecstasy. The light fades, the sound seems to ascend, and all is dark again on the hill-sides around Bethlehem.” But the shepherds could not forget what they had seen and heard ; the first human proclaimers of the accomplished fact of Christ’s Advent,—they hastened away to tell (in their own lowly sphere) of how light had shone in the darkness. Never again was the old gloom to prevail. Christ was Himself, in His human birth, the Dawn of Day. “Very early, very early, Christ was born.” The day broke. “Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising.” He had come Who should feed His flock

like a shepherd, gathering the lambs with His arm,
and carrying them in His bosom. Shadows—types
and legal ceremonies—were fleeing away.

“ In Him Incarnate Peace her reign began,
In Him the law of Love was given to man.
New eras dawned and slumb’ring hopes awoke,
When His first Morn the mist of ages broke.”

“ Sleep, Holy Babe !
While I with Mary gaze
In joy upon that Face awhile,
Upon the loving infant smile
Which there divinely plays.

Sleep, Holy Babe !
Ah ! take Thy brief repose :
Too quickly will Thy slumbers break,
And Thou to lengthen’d pains awake,
That death alone shall close.”



